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Higher Education in India

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English education in India is often said to have been imposed on the country by its alien rulers, and that with just one aim—the manufacture of the requisite number of 'native' clerks for the Company's service. This is true, but it is not the whole truth. In the great debate that took place a century ago on the lines to be followed in Indian educational policy, Indian opinion preferred the new type of Anglicized education to traditional modes of instruction; and the Minute of Macaulay which turned the scale is a conspicuous instance of a good finding based on false pleas. Wilson and his friends, 'the Orientalists,' knew a great deal of Indian literature and cared much for it; Macaulay was firmly convinced that what he did not know was not worth knowing. And yet, is there nothing that we have to be grateful for, even to Macaulay?

"When the Indian National Congress came into being," observes a modern historian, "it debated in English; if an Indian Declaration of Independence should ever be drafted, it will almost certainly be in the same language." This was said ten years ago. I am not now certain that the draft will be in the English language; it may well be in Hindustani, and English may ostentatiously be kept out of it; but I am certain that it will be thought out in the English language before it is translated into Hindustani or any other tongue.

Why is there so much disappointment in the country with higher education and its results? How far is this feeling of disappointment justified by facts, and how much of it due merely to sentiment or misunderstanding?

Our Universities are certainly no models of perfection. They have hardly got out of the handicaps put upon them by their origin. Modelled on the London University as it was at its worst, the elder Universities were just examining boards grading candidates coached in colleges affiliated to them, and the younger Universities—they were not many of them—followed them in every respect.

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It is not twenty years since the Sadler Commission carried out a searching enquiry into the state of higher education in India, and all Universities embarked on a programme of reform and reorganization. This short period has already several good results to show. Facilities for higher study and original research in various branches of knowledge have been built up, and are being increased. Indian scholars and learned periodicals are gaining increasing recognition wherever academic work of good quality is respected. Problems of Indian agriculture, industry, engineering, history and so on are being successfully handled more and more by Indians. True, what has been done is little by the side of what remains; but this is due, on the whole, to the newness of the effort and the limited resources employed in it. It will always be possible to point to something wrong here, or some waste there; but such is the process of life, and we must take a large view of things to see them in their true relations. It is an old saying of our land that we do not cease to sow because there are deer in the country.

There are defects in the present position of higher education, and some of them are serious. A tacit rule of politeness, or whatever it is, seems to forbid their being mentioned aloud or discussed seriously. Many students are admitted to University courses who are or have been obviously unable to profit by them. This is due partly to the needs of colleges depending on fee income and partly to the competition among the increasing number of Universities lowering the standards of admission and examinations of all grades. The newer Universities are mere replicas of the older ones, and have so far done little to vary or enrich the methods and opportunities of higher study open to their alumni. Sometimes even objects statutorily declared have been laid aside; for instance, the Andhra University Act expressly provided for the promotion of the study of Telugu and its use as medium of instruction and examination, and this provision has remained a dead letter for a dozen years now.

All this must be changed, and changed soon, or the Universities will become the targets of even more powerful attacks than they are exposed to today. It is said in Madras that the S. S. L. C. is a failure as an entrance test to the University, and the 'Matriculation examination' is looked forward to as a

method of selection of candidates for University courses. We live in an age of quick changes and short memories. It was not so long ago that Matriculation was loudly inveighed against as the slaughter of the innocents, and the S. S. L. C. hailed as a new heaven. Then the S. S. L. C. was step by step shorn of every one of its distinguishing features, until now it has come to be just the old Matriculation conducted by a Board under Government and 'moderated' by another Board under the University. And now the University wants to conduct the examination also. Whatever the real solution of the problem of selection for University courses, no one will contemplate with satisfaction the prospect of a mass Matriculation examination at which tens of thousands of candidates will be examined and graded year after year mostly by examiners who have little or no knowledge of schools and school work.

What again is the relation between Secondary and University education? We seem to be so obsessed by the one leading to the other that we have begun to evolve a new jargon of pre-university courses and so on. One would have thought that an honest acceptance of the time-honoured division of education into Primary, Secondary and University stages was good enough for all practical purposes, and the rest was a matter of money and men and work. You cannot diversify courses of study by making rules or holding new discussions of well-worn themes. And a sound general education at the secondary stage must fit pupils of more than average ability for all the higher training that the University has to offer. And the idea of reviving the Matriculation has no virtue in it and hardly fits in with the trend of things. Finding little cause for satisfaction with the progress in schools in the adoption of Indian languages as the media of instruction on a voluntary basis, the Government of Madras have decided, and I think decided rightly, to force the pace by compelling the adoption of this method in uni-lingual areas. There are difficulties; but time is not likely to lessen them unless we endeavour strenuously to do so. And compulsion in this matter may well be that modicum of force necessary to enable the good to take root. The natural consequence of this reform must be to entrust the School-leaving examination to a separate Board for each linguistic area; thus the examination would become more manageable, and a better test of the capa-

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city of the candidates than a centralised omnibus examination. Of course, again, there are difficulties. Will Travancore, Cochin and Malabar agree to have a common Board? Will the Ceded Districts and the Circars co-operate? Will there not be difference in standards among four or five different examinations? Life is full of difficulties everywhere, and India seems unfortunately to be endowed with a double dose of them at every step. But elsewhere they are overcome by endeavour, patience and character; we must learn to do it too, instead of despairing of things, or playing at educational reform. If the presence of eighteen Universities is no bar to a conception of common standards among them and reciprocity arrangements based on such a conception, the creation of separate Boards for language areas and the maintenance of some common standard among them in due course should offer no insuperable difficulty.

A word regarding the Intermediate. The Committee of Principals of Colleges and Headmasters on the Academic Council deserve to be congratulated on their decision to keep the Intermediate course and examination as they are. The proposal to abolish them and add one year to the school course and the other to the degree course looks attractive, particularly because it will bring the spread of Indian courses of study superficially into line with what prevails elsewhere. But this suggestion first put forward by the Sadler Commission, was considered by the Universities once and either rejected *ab initio* as unsuited to our conditions, or given up after a trial. Our Intermediate is really intermediate between the school and the University proper: our schools, as they are, are not suited either to send pupils fully prepared for the University courses; and the practical difficulties, financial and other, in the way of adding a class at the top could not be easily overcome by them. In the coming years, we shall be up against the question, which will stay with us for some time, of effecting a proper transition from the study of subjects through the mother-tongue to the higher pursuit of them through another medium. And as a preparation for Medicine and Engineering courses, the Intermediate has proved a valuable asset. Colleges may be trusted to evolve their own solutions for the problems of instruction, discipline, and social life rising out of the presence of grown up school boys (this is no metaphor) alongside of undergraduates.

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For some years after the introduction of the S.S.L.C., admission to the Intermediate classes was left in the hands of the Principals of Colleges, the University automatically enrolling as matriculates all students so admitted. The experiment, which in the first years led to large numbers being taken in by needy colleges, was terminated rather abruptly; if it had gone on for some time, the evil would have eradicated itself, if only the standard of examination at the end of the Intermediate course had been firmly maintained at a reasonable level. In fact, fear of unpopularity on the part of University authorities and their reluctance to stand up to public criticism, even when it is most ill-informed and unjust, has been the greatest obstacle in the way of the maintenance of proper standards at examinations, and, as a result, in the working of the courses. I think that even now the simplest and best solution of the problem of entrance to the Intermediate is to be found in laying responsibility for it in the hands of heads of colleges coupled with a firm adherence to definite standards in the conduct of the Intermediate examination. Under such an arrangement, any college that does not play the game will soon be found out.

The question is bound to be asked with increasing emphasis in the future even more than at present: "What does all this University education mean to the common man in the street?" But many who are working in the Universities have been putting themselves this question for some time now. It often happens that the general attack upon an old evil starts not when it is at its worst, but when a reform has begun and there is dissatisfaction with the pace of improvement. We seem to be passing through a time of somewhat impassioned criticism of higher education in which some valid truths are mixed up with much that will not bear analysis.

"Certainly it is true," says Masaryk, "that man is not clear in his mind, in spite of all his desire for clarity," and this natural confusion multiplies tenfold when we begin to think with our blood. It is essential to try and think calmly and constructively as far as we can.

Take this question of the medium of a foreign language. In his powerful article on Higher Education, Gandhiji has said: "The medium of a foreign language through which higher education has been imparted in India has caused incalculable intellec-

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tual and moral injury to the nation." No one will deny that it would have been infinitely better to have had our higher education through our own languages; but what were the chances of that happening? What *are* the chances of it today? It is no use to say that the present system has diminished the chances of its happening from what they were in the nineteenth century. Gandhiji concedes the difficulty of forming a correct judgment on this issue, and relies on his own experience in school, which has been the experience of everyone of us, but of which he gives a vivid account in two or three paragraphs of nervous English which will adorn any anthology of modern English prose. All the same, is the position that we find in India so unprecedented? In 1898 Masaryk said practically the same thing in Bohemia and loudly complained of the lack of Czech text-books. Ireland is another example. Moreover there have been instances of countries like Japan and China having had to adopt the modern European methods and languages as the instruments of their higher culture. And anyone with the slightest experience of original work in an Indian University,—I am not thinking even of persons who have gone to Europe for a period of higher study and returned,—will tell you that for keeping abreast of modern studies in any subject English is not enough, but French, German, and other languages are necessary ancillaries. These are all facts. And I venture to doubt the correctness of his analysis when Gandhiji writes: "A word about literature. We had to learn several books of English prose and English poetry. No doubt all this was nice. But that knowledge has been of no use to me in serving or bringing me in touch with the masses. I am unable to say that if I had not learnt what I did of English prose and poetry, I should have missed a rare treasure. If I had, instead, passed those precious seven years in mastering Gujarati and had learnt Mathematics, Sciences, and Sanskrit and other subjects through Gujarati, I could easily have shared the knowledge so gained with my neighbours. I would have enriched Gujarati, and who can say that I would not have, with my habit of application and my inordinate love for the country and the mother-tongue, made a richer and greater contribution to the service of the masses?" It is doubtful if a good biographer of Mahatmaji will accept this estimate; he would find

it easy to demonstrate that the shining achievements of his great life are largely traceable to his higher education, such as it was, coupled of course with his superb personal qualities. In the course of his argument Gandhiji mentions 'Rabindranath's matchless productions'; how many of us realised their matchlessness till their English renderings gained him recognition abroad?

I do not mean to say by all this that we should not replace the English medium in our higher studies. But I do say that this foreign medium has not been such an unalloyed evil; that it may have to be kept for some time more for all higher education, and for some of it for as long as we can foresee at present.

The Universities are quite alive to the problem of popularising modern knowledge in the languages of the people. Only, they cannot yet be said to have discovered a workable method of achieving the result. Prizes have been offered for books on modern subjects; but the experience of the last few years, which is all we have to go by, shows that this new literature is not made to order, and, one encouraging feature, notable success has attended in some cases where experienced teachers of University grade have addressed themselves seriously to this task. There is the longer experience of the Osmania University but the best opinion on this matter seems to favour the plan of having original treatises written by teachers in preference to that of translating the more important text-books from other languages. Translations of great books will have their due place later; but the present problem is one of evolving a commonly accepted idiom in each language to act as the vehicle of new ideas. For this, original expositions in manuals of varying sizes must have precedence. Is it too much to hope that in this matter University Departments of Research will be enabled to take sufficient interest, by setting apart some of their resources in time and men towards the furtherance of this purpose?

Higher education, again, is said to be the cause of unemployment; as if it is only the educated that are unemployed in India, or there are no avenues of useful employment to be found for their talents if only we could organize even existing resources better, or there was no unemployment in other lands with admittedly superior educational systems. Higher education should not be held responsible for sins not its own.

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One word in conclusion on the financing of higher education. Time was when all education in the country depended on voluntary endowments and these endowments were kept up in a continuous flow in days when the people had faith in the merits of 'Vidya-dana.' Even now schools of the old type are seen flourishing here and there entirely on such donations. And it cannot be said that private charity has altogether ignored the claims of modern education, for we can cite several examples of notable munificence. But if higher education and culture is an essential mark of civilised existence and the condition of progress in the arts and amenities of life, it should be the duty of the State to continue to finance it, as it has been doing so far. It is indeed a surprising paradox that the place of higher education in national life should be called in question at a time when the country is striving to build up an independent and self-contained national life. Higher education might have been a luxury during the time when we were content to let everything be done for us, doing nothing ourselves but being the passive recipients of the benefits of modern civilisation. There is Java where still the people exist for their rulers and there are no institutions or problems of higher education. India and Java had a common history till about the fifteenth century A.D.; and today India differs from Java in her preservation of ancient culture and in her readiness to conquer new worlds of thought and action. This is in no small measure due to the higher cultural contacts that India has been able, in the midst of many difficulties and discouragements, to maintain and develop in the hundred odd years of British rule. Should India, in her march towards the goal of political independence, let down her ideals of higher education below what they have been so far? For, let there be no mistake about it, any sudden withdrawal of the State from the sphere of higher education would spell instantaneous ruin to the University system of the country. And when it disappears, it may not be the only victim of the change.

It has been said that the State must pay for education only wherever it has definite use for it. What is the criterion of judgment? If we begin to talk of definite use, everyone must admit that Universities are the last institutions that will survive such a test. They often glory in definitely useless pur-

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suits; and do we not bestow the title 'academic' on all things of no practical use? Yet it is a commonplace of experience that most useful things trace their origin ultimately to such idle pursuits. The knowledge pursued in Universities is like a growing live forest; it is no good timber as it is; but there is the making of it.